

James Madison to Edmund Randolph, September 10, 1782. Partly in Cipher. Transcription: The Writings of James Madison, ed. Gaillard Hunt. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900-1910.

TO EDMUND RANDOLPH.¹

1 From the Madison Papers (1840).

Philadelphia, September 10, 1782.

Dear Sir, —The loss of the French seventy-four in Boston harbour presented an occasion, which was embraced by Congress, of making a small requital to their Ally for his benevolent exertions in behalf of the United States. They have directed the Agent of Marine to replace the loss by presenting, in the name of the United States, the ship *America* to the Chevalier de la Luzerne, for the service of His Most Christian Majesty. The *States* were unanimous in this vote. The dissenting members were Bland and Jones, of Virginia.

The report of the Grand Committee, “that the Western lands, if ceded to the United States, would be an important fund,” &c., was the subject of the deliberations of Congress on Thursday and Friday last. After the usual discussion of the question of right, and a proposal of opposite amendments to make the report favor the opposite sides, a turn was given to the debate to the question of expediency, in which it became pretty evident to all parties, that unless a compromise took place, no advantage could ever be derived to the United States, even if their right were ever so valid. The number of States interested in the opposite doctrine rendered it impossible

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for the title of the United States ever to obtain a vote of Congress in its favor, much less any coercive measures to render the title of any fiscal importance; whilst the individual States, having both the will and the means to avail themselves of their pretensions, might open their land offices, issue their patents, and, if necessary, protect the execution of their plans; without any other molestation than the clamors of individuals within and without the doors of Congress. This view of the case had a manifest effect on the most temperate advocates of the Federal title. Witherspoon moved a set of resolutions recommending to the States which had made no cessions to take up the subject; and to the States whose cessions were not entirely conformable to the plan of Congress, to reconsider their acts; and declaring, that in case of a compliance of the several States claiming the back lands, none of their *determinations* with regard to private property within their cessions shall be *reversed or altered* without their consent, except in cases falling within the ninth Article of the Confederation. On this motion the report was postponed, and these resolutions committed. The report of the committee on the last article will probably determine the ultimate sense of Congress on the pretensions of the companies.

Every review I take of the Western territory produces fresh conviction, that it is the true policy of Virginia, as well as of the United States, to bring the dispute to a friendly compromise. A separate government cannot be distant, and will be an insuperable barrier to subsequent profits. If, therefore, the decision of the State on the claims of companies can be saved, I hope her other conditions will be relaxed.